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Docket 81219F-P

## MODIFICATION OF RECEIVER SURFACE TO REJECT STAMP CANCELLATION INFORMATION

Express Mail Label No.: EL 267 109 455 US

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## FIELD OF THE INVENTION

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10 At present, official postage stamps are designed to accept a cancellation mark as the stamp passes through the postal sorting equipment. The cancellation mark shows the stamp has been used as postage on a piece of mail and cannot be used again. With the advent of the personalized postage stamp as described in U.S. 5,873,605 a consumer can submit a personal image and have the personal image become part of the postage stamp 10 as shown in Fig. 1. The

15 stamp 10 comprises an official postal image (indicia) 20 printed in an official postal image area 24 bordered on the inside border by lines 25, 26, 27, and 28 and on the outside edge by perforations 30. The stamp 10 includes a personal image 40 lying inside the personal image area 45 bordered by the lines 25, 26, 27, and 28. The personalized postage stamp 10 can be created using several methods.

20 Images that can be used for the personal image portion of the personalized postage stamp 10 can be consumer images obtained from a variety of sources. For example, but limited to, consumer image files stored in digital format on floppy disks, Picture CDs, Photo CDs, CD-ROMs, down loaded from the Internet, and negatives and prints scanned using the consumer's own scanner.

25 Typically because of the high quality required, the official postal  
image 20 on a postage stamp 10 is printed first using a Gravure process. The  
Gravure process is capable of creating images of very high resolution, way beyond  
the capabilities of most common printers. The Gravure process is an intaglio  
process. It uses a depressed or sunken surface etched into a copper cylinder to  
30 create the image and the unetched surface of the cylinder represent non-printing  
areas. The cylinder rotates in a bath of ink and the etched area picks up the ink

Since the personal image 40 is not part of the official postal stamp, meaning the official postal image 20 can be used as postage without the personalized image area 40, while the personalized image 40 cannot. The personal image 40 can be printed at a later time using for example, a thermal printer, wax sublimation printer, electro-photographic printer or ink jet printer directly onto the stamp 10 as shown in Fig. 1. The personal image 40 can be printed as a separate sticker 41 and adhered directly to the official stamp in a designated area 50 as shown in Fig. 2a such as is disclosed in U.S. 5,423,573. The personal image 40 can also be printed adjacent to or below the stamp 10 as shown in Fig. 2b and Fig. 2c respectively such as is disclosed in international patent application PCT/AU99/00346.

However, the postal product may be integrally part of a postcard, label or any other item now used for retaining official postage. The stamp cancellation device prints the cancellation mark 60 across the entire surface of the stamp 10 as shown in Fig. 3. For the purposes of the present invention an official postal product shall be defined as a product by itself or as affixed to another product and that is recognized as official postage, which can be used to send items through the official governmental postal system. The cancellation mark 60 extends across the official postal area 24 of the stamp 10 as well as the personal image area 45 thus obscuring the personalized portion. A typical official United States postage stamp is printed with inks that have a pigment, when excited by ultraviolet light at a peak wavelength of 254 nanometers, phosphoresce in the visible (green) region of the spectrum with a peak wavelength of 526 nanometers. Current equipment in the post office is used for scanning of the postage for verifying that it is authentic postage and to locate where the stamp is on the envelope for cancellation.

The present invention provides a method and system for customizing an official postal product that solves many of the problems of the prior art. The method and system also provides high quality images on official postal products having the required quality, characteristics, and content standards.

10 In accordance with one aspect of the present invention there is provided an official postal product comprised of a first image area having an official postal indicia a second image area having a personal image. A protective coating is placed over the second image area such that official cancellation mark placed over the second area will not permanently adhere to the personal image.

15 In another aspect of the present invention there is provided an official postal product comprised of a first image area having an official postal indicia a second image area for receiving a separate label having a personal image thereon. The label being made of a material such that an official postal cancellation mark will not be permanently adhered thereto. In yet another aspect

20 of the present invention there is provided an official postal product comprised of a first image area having an official postal indicia a second image area for receiving a separate label having a personal image thereon. The second image having a protective coating thereon such that an official postal cancellation mark will not be permanently adhered thereto.

In another aspect of the present invention there is provided a kit for  
25 producing an official postal product having a personal image. The kit is  
comprised of a first sheet having a plurality official postal products each of the  
products having a first official image area having an official postal indicia and a  
second area for receiving a personal image. A second sheet having a plurality of  
labels each having a personal image thereon. Each of the labels having a personal  
30 image being adapted to place in the second area of the official postal product, each

In still another aspect of the present invention there is provided an apparatus for applying a protective coating on a personalized image product, the personalized image product is comprised of a first area having an official postage image thereon and a second area having a personal image thereon.

In another aspect of the present invention there is provided an apparatus for providing a cancellation on an official postal product. The official postal product having an official image area having official postal indicia and a second area having a personal image. The apparatus having a scanner for determining the location of the first area and a printhead for applying a cancellation onto the first area in response to the scanner locating said first area.

In another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for making an official postal product. The method comprises the steps of providing a printing substrate, printing official postal indicia in a first area on the printing substrate, printing a personal image in a second area on the printing substrate. The second area being apart and distinct from the first area and applying a protective coating on the personal image such that a cancellation mark will not be adhered thereto.

In a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for making a postal product. The method comprises the steps of providing a printing substrate, printing official postal indicia in a first area on the substrate, printing a personal image in a second area on the substrate. The second area being

separate from the first area. The printer uses a printing substance (ink) that will not accept a cancellation placed thereon.

In yet a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of providing a kit for making personalized postal products. The method is comprised of the steps of providing a plurality of postal products each having a first area having an official postal indicia and a second area for receiving a personal image. A plurality of personal images is provided for placement in the second area. The personal images each having a protective coating thereon such that an official postal cancellation mark will not adhere to the personal image.

In another aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for canceling an official postal product having a first area having an official postal indicia and a second area having a personal image. The official postal indicia is capable of being located on the postal product using a sensing device. The method further comprises the steps of scanning the postal product using the sensing device for obtaining information with respect to the location of said first area and canceling only the first area based on the information obtained from the scanning.

These and other aspects, objects, features and advantages of the present invention will be more clearly understood and appreciated from a review of the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments and appended claims, and by reference to the accompanying drawings.

#### **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

In the detailed description of the preferred embodiments of the invention presented below, reference is made to the accompanying drawings in which:

Fig. 1 is a plan view of a personalized postage stamp made in accordance with the prior art;

Fig. 2a, 2b, and 2c are plan views of a personalized postage stamp made in accordance with the prior art;

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Fig. 3 is a plan view of a portion of an envelope with a postal product in the form of a personalized postage stamp affixed to the envelope having a postal cancellation mark in accordance with the prior art;

Fig. 5 is a cross-sectional view of a medium having a coating, which can be used with a personalized postage stamp printer made in accordance with the present invention;

Fig.7 illustrates a cross-sectional view of the personalized postage stamp formed in the receiving layer made in accordance with the present invention;

Fig. 9a is a schematic drawing illustrating a personal image area portion of a personalized postage stamp printed separately in the form of a sticker.

Fig. 9c is a schematic drawing illustrating the official portion of a plurality of personalized postage stamps printed in the form of a sheet made in accordance with the present invention.

Fig. 9d is a schematic drawing illustrating the official portion of a plurality of personalized postage stamps printed in the form of a sheet made in accordance with the present invention.

Fig. 9e is a schematic drawing illustrating a sheet of a plurality of personalized postage stamps after the personal image has been printed in the personal image area made in accordance with the present invention.

Fig. 10 is a schematic drawing illustrating the application of the cancellation mark via a printer onto stamp over the official postal image.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring to Fig. 4, there is illustrated a plan view of a portion of an envelope 70 having a postal product in the form of a personalized postage stamp 10 attached thereto made in accordance with the present invention. A protective coating 80 (shown in Fig. 7) of a material has been applied to the personal image 40 of the stamp 10. The protective coating repels the cancellation mark 60, which is applied across the entire surface of the stamp 10 during the postage sorting and cancellation process. Because the protective coating 80 is applied only to personal image 40 the cancellation stamp 60 will adhere to the official postal image 20 of the stamp 10.

Referring to Fig. 5, there is illustrated a cross-sectional view of a medium 90 which can be used with a printer for making a personalized postage stamp in accordance with the present invention. The medium 90 comprises a support layer 100. The support layer 100 can be formed of paper, for example photographic paper without the emulsion or plastic such as polyethylene terephthalate or polyethylene naphthlate on the bottom surface 105 of the support layer 100 is coated an adhesive layer 130. The adhesive is typical of the adhesive layer found on the back of stamps. In one form, the adhesive must be moistened before applying the stamp to the envelope. In a second form, the adhesive is self-adhering such as in the case of a sticker. Over the top surface 106 of the support layer 100 there is provided a translucent or transparent receiving layer 110. The receiving layer 110 is designed to receive an image placed thereon by the printer. In the embodiment illustrated, the translucent or transparent receiving layer 110 comprises gelatin and polymer having a 50:50 mix ratio. The gelatin may be any commercially available gelatin as is well known in the art. The polymer is AQ55, which may be purchased from the Eastman Chemical Corporation. Placed over the translucent receiving layer 110 is a protective translucent or transparent layer 120, which in the particular embodiment illustrated is methylcellulose. The protective layer 120 shields and protects the image 200 (shown in Fig. 6) from abrasion and UV rays but not from moisture. The



receiving layer 110 and protective layer 120 may be applied in any well known coating techniques used for applying a thin layer on a substrate.

Referring to Fig. 6, there is illustrated a schematic view of medium 90 with an image 200 being applied via a digital inkjet printer head 210 found in a typical prior art inkjet printer. For example, head 210 may be of any commercial type found in the following printers: Canon BJC-610, BJC-4100, Hewlett Packard HP682, HP855, HP870, or Epson Stylus 500. The ink 220 may be of as any commercially available ink used by these printers. The ink 220 passes through the protective layer 120 and is absorbed by the receiving layer 110. As is illustrated in Fig. 6, the image 200 is formed in the translucent receiving layer 110. The image 200 may also be formed using and a digital electrophotographic printer such as an Indigo – E – 1000.

Referring to Fig.7, there is illustrated a cross-sectional view of a stamp 10 made in accordance with the present invention, like numerals indicating like elements as previously discussed. Stamp 10 comprises two digital images that have been integrally formed in the receiving layer 110 using one of the printers described in Fig. 6. The two digital images are the official postal image 20 and personal image 40. A protective coating 80 has been applied as shown in Fig. 8 over the personal image 40. The protective coating 80 prevented the cancellation mark 60 from permanently adhering to personal image 40. In some cases the cancellation mark will not stay at all. In other cases, the cancellation mark can be easily removed, for example by wiping with a clean cloth etc. Since no protective coating was applied to the official postal area 24, the cancellation 60 mark adheres to the official postal image 20 of the stamp 10. As illustrated, the outer edge 85 of protective coating 80 is substantially in co-alignment with the outer edge 86 of personal image 40. Preferably edge 85 extends slightly past edge 86 of the personal image 40 so that the personal image 40 will not be cancelled.

In yet another embodiment of the present invention the protective coating 80 can be formed as part of the printing process of printing the personal image 40 as the personal image area 45 is being printed.

Referring to Fig. 8, there is illustrated a cross-sectional view of the stamp 10 described in Fig 7, made in accordance with the present invention, like numerals indicating like elements as previously discussed. Using the phosphorescent characteristics of an official United States postage stamp as described in the background of the invention, a scanner 310 detects which area of the stamp 10 is the official postal image 20 and which area is the personal image 40. A protective coating 80 is applied via the print head 300 as the medium 90 on which the stamp 10 is formed moves by the scanner 310 in the direction indicated by the arrow 320. The scanner 310 is a CCD liner array filtered to detect emissions in the visible (green) region of the spectrum with a peak wavelength of 526. As the stamp 10 moves by the scanner 310 the scanner detects where the personal image 40 lies. Using the control and logic unit 330 the scanner 310 directs the print head 300 which is located in a fixed relationship to the scanner 310 to apply the protective coating 80 in the form of droplets 340. The droplets 340 spread out on impact and cover the personal image 40 with a uniform protective coating 80. The printer used for applying the coating can be for example a thermal printer, wax sublimation printer or inkjet printer. The printer does not apply the coating to the official postal area 24.

With respect to printing materials as described in U.S. 5,984,539 a protective coating can be applied using water-based solutions that are substantially free of volatile organic compounds. Preferred solutions can include combinations of one or more water-based latex solutions that can include at least one component, which has a glass transition temperature  $T_G$  (softening point) above 25 degrees C and at least one component which has a  $T_G$  (softening point) at or below 25 degrees C. These solutions can include acrylic or acrylate polymers, vinyl polymers, polyurethanes, polyesters and the like. Additional components may include surfactants, spreading agents, lubricants, and anti-blocking agents, curing agents, etc.

In another embodiment as shown in Fig. 9a, the personal image area 45 is printed separately in the form of a sticker 41. The corner 49 of the personal image 40 is shown partially peeled off illustrating how personal image 40

may be removed at some time. The personal image area 45 can be printed in quantities on a sheet 350 using a thermal printer (not shown) such as the KODAK PS 8650 Color Printer or a KODAK Photo Printer 4700 as shown in Fig 9b.

Thermally printed images are used in a number of different applications. In one of those applications, so-called "sticker prints" are made on a sheet and arranged so that they can be peeled off and individually pasted onto another surface. When the personal image area 45 is printed separately, a protective layer such as is applied via the thermal printer preventing damage to the image from moisture, fingerprints, etc. The fourth pass of the thermal printing process is used to form a transferable protective layer over the image. The transferable protection layer comprises poly (vinylformal), poly (vinyl benzyl) or poly (vinyl acetyl) containing at least about 5 mole % hydroxyl. For a more complete description of this process reference is made to commonly assigned U.S. Patent No. 5,387,573 and U.S. Patent No. 5,332,713 which are incorporated herein by reference. As such the protective layer applied in this manner will prevent the cancellation mark from adhering to the personal image area 45.

Referring now to Fig. 9c, a schematic drawing of personalized postage stamps 10 having the official postal stamp area 24 and the area 50 designated for the personal image printed separately in the form of sheet 360. The sticker 41 containing the personal image 40 is peeled from the sheet 350 and adhered directly to the official stamp in a designated area 50.

Referring now to Fig. 9d, a schematic drawing of personalized postage stamps 10 having the official postal stamp area 24 and the area 50 designated for the personal image 40 (See Fig 9d) printed separately in the form of sheet 370. Sheet 370 may be printed using any acceptable printing technique.

Referring now to Fig. 9e, there is illustrated a schematic drawing of sheet 370 of Fig. 9d having the personal image 40 printed in the personal image area 45 as discussed previously like numbers designate like elements. In one form, the image 40 is printed using one technique (such as inkjet) where only the personal image 40 is printed with an ink that will not accept a cancellation mark.

In yet another embodiment referring to Fig. 10, there is illustrated a cross-sectional view of the stamp 10, described in Fig 7 and system for canceling the official postal area 24, made in accordance with the present invention, like numerals indicating like elements as previously discussed. During the sorting and cancellation process the CCD liner array scanner 310 (described in Fig. 8) using the phosphorescent characteristics of an official United States postage stamp as described in the background of the invention, detects the official postage image area 20 and which area is the personal image 40. As the envelope 70 carrying the stamp 10 moves by the scanner 310 in the direction indicated by the arrow 410 the scanner detects where the official postage image area 20 is located. The scanner 310 directs an inkjet print head 400 via a logic and control unit 420 to apply the cancellation mark 60 only across the official postage image area 20 of the stamp 10. Using this method no cancellation mark is applied over the personal image 40.

The invention has been described in detail with particular reference to certain preferred embodiments thereof, but it will be understood that variations and modifications can be effected within the scope of the invention, the present invention being defined by the following claims.

1. The first step is to identify the problem. This involves understanding the current situation and the goals that need to be achieved.

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330	Logic and control logic unit
340	Droplet
350	Sheet
360	Sheet
370	Sheet Inkjet print head arrow
400	Logic and control logic unit
410	Arrow
420	Control Unit